Something Upstairs by Avi

Guided Reading Resources

**Reading Response Questions**

Author’s Explanation and Chapter One

1. How is Kenny’s new home in Providence different from where he used to live in California?
2. Where does Kenny decide to live in the new house? Why do you think he decides to live there?
3. Who is the narrator of the book? From what point of view is the story told?
4. Provide one example of descriptive writing from the text.
5. In the Authors Explanation, Avi says that “Writing is mostly imagination, things you’ve noticed or heard rather than things you’ve done.”Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain why.

Chapter Two

1. Where does Kenny go to find information about his house?
2. List 3 pieces of information that Kenny learns about the history of Providence.
3. Give one example of a simile from the text.
4. Why does Kenny want to find out more information about the history of his house?

Chapter Three

1. What does Willinghast tell Kenny about slavery in Providence? What is Kenny’s reaction?
2. How does Caleb look in comparison to Kenny?
3. Why can’t Caleb leave the upstairs attic?
4. Describe Caleb’s relationship with Kenny using examples from the book.

Chapter Four

1. What changes does Kenny notice as he follows the mystery man down Transit Street?
2. How does Kenny’s appearance change? Why does this occur?
3. Who cuts an X into the wall? What is his reason for doing it?
4. What type of job is Kenny given? Where is he told to go?
5. Something Upstairs is a work of historical fiction, meaning that the story uses a real historical time and place to tell a fictional story. Write down the places where you notice things that are historical, where you notice things that are definitely fiction, and where you are not sure whether it is history or fiction.

Chapter Five

1. Describe how Kenny feels when he wakes up.
2. What does Kenny learn about Caleb? What does he ask Kenny to do?
3. Why do you think that Caleb doesn’t trust Kenny?
4. How does Kenny find evidence of Caleb’s death? What was so strange about it?
5. Pick a character from the book (Kenny, Caleb, Pardon Willinghast, etc.) and describe their characteristics. Some things you might include are his or her physical appearance, background, emotions, and what the character wants in the book.

Chapter Six

1. What is the name of the place that Caleb takes Kenny? Can you think of why this place is named that?
2. What does Willinghast recommend to Mr. Ormbsee? Why?
3. What does Willinghast take away from Kenny?
4. Why is Kenny so upset at the end of the chapter?

Chapter Seven

1. How do the mob of sailors behave when they first enter Olney Street?
2. What does Caleb say to the sailors? How do they react?
3. How does the weather change over the course of the chapter?
4. Write a short reaction to the chapter. How did it make you feel? What do you think the author wanted the reader to think?

Chapter Eight

1. Where does Kenny take Caleb?
2. What does Kenny discover about the door?
3. Who does Kenny see after he leaves Caleb? What does he ask him to do?
4. What would you do if you were in Kenny’s situation? What decision would you make and why?

Chapter Nine

1. What does Caleb decide to do to fool Willinghast? Is it successful?
2. How does Avi create a mood of tension in this chapter? Give specific examples.
3. Today in class we discussed the importance of gravestones in learning about past people. What information does Kenny learn from the gravestones? Why do you think Kenny takes Avi to the grave?

**Vocabulary**

**Author’s Explanation and Chapter One**

**tentative** not confident; hesitant

**awe** a feeling of deep respect mixed with fear or wonder

**closet (v)** shut away, especially in a private room

**majestic** showing impressive beauty or dignity

**ominously** in a manner that gives the impression something bad is going to happen

**Chapter Two**

**blotch**  irregularly shaped spot

**quizzically** questioningly; in a questioning or wondering manner

**scrapbook** a book of blank pages for collecting drawings, pictures, papers

**vivid**  producing powerful feelings or strong, clear images in the mind

**Chapter Three**

**irregular** not even or balanced in shape

**smoldering** burning slowly with smoke but without a flame

**inclination** a person’s way of acting or feeling; an interesting in or liking for something

**evasively** in a manner that is avoiding or indirect

**candid** truthful and straightforward

**agitator**  a person who urges others to protest or rebel

**blithely**  happily, with joy

**Chapter Four**

**shabby**  in poor condition; old and not well cared for

**stoop (n)** a porch with steps in front of a house or other building

**mast** a tall post on a boat that holds up sails

**spar**  a thick, strong pole used as a mast

**rigging**  the system of ropes that hold up a ship’s masts and control sails

**sail** a piece of material that catches the wind and pushes a boat forward

**Chapter Five**

**retreat**  to withdraw; make a retreat

**relent**  to soften in temper; to give in

**circumstance**  any happening or fact; event

**perplex**  to confuse or puzzle; to make uncertain

**perplexity** the state of being perplexed or puzzled

**steadfast** firm, constant, not chanign

**steadfastly**  to act in a constant or firm way

**beneficiary** anyone receiving benefits

**pursue** to follow in order to overtake, capture or kill; chase

**Chapter Six**

**gruff**  rough and low (a voice)

**coarse** having a rough texture

**foul (adj)** having a disgusting smell or taste

**reluctantly** unwillingly

**custom agent** a person who works for the government collecting taxes on imported goods

**lurch** an abrupt and uncontrolled movement

**cessation** an ending

**dumbfounded** very astonished or amazed

**Chapter Seven**

**musket** an old-fashioned gun with a long barrel

**abide** accept or tolerate

**mob** a large group or people, especially one that intents to cause harm or violence

**deluge** a flood

**peer** to look

**jeer** to make loud, mocking remarks

**veer** to suddenly change direction

**Chapter Eight**

**taper (n)** a skinny candle

**resigned (adj)** having accepted something you don’t like because you can’t change it

**reverberate** to repeat like an echo

**guardian** defender or protector

**remorse** deep regret or guilt for doing something wrong

**Chapter Nine**

**rap** to strike a hard surface; to knock

**convulsively** in a jerking, fitful way

**urgency** needing immediate action

**feeble** weak

**coax** to persuade or convince slowly, often by flattering someone